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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0968
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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 2258
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7201
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003278

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: SHOW OF RESILIENCE LIKELY BEHIND RECENT FARC
ATTACKS

REF: BOGOTA 2266

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Colombian officials accused the FARC of carrying out several deadly bombings in Cali, Bogota and in Antioquia province. These attacks were likely designed to demonstrate the terrorist group's continued resilience after a string of high profile, tactical GOC victories. President Uribe accused the FARC of setting off a car bomb near the Palace of Justice in Cali on August 31 that killed four civilians and injured 26. Police believe that the FARC detonated a bomb in Ituango, Antioquia on August 14, killing seven civilians and wounding more than 50 others, in response to the GOC's increased drug eradication efforts in Antioquia. Several smaller bombings in Bogota have been blamed on FARC extortion attempts. The FARC has not claimed responsibility for any of these acts, but issued a communique on August 21 stressing that it remains "strong" and would continue to "thrive in the midst of adversity." End Summary.

GOC BLAMES FARC FOR CALI CAR BOMBING

¶2. (C) President Uribe blamed the Manuel Cepeda Vargas column of the FARC for an August 31 car bomb near the Palace of Justice in downtown Cali that killed four and wounded 28. Leading daily "El Tiempo" reported that the bomb damaged four stories of the Palace of Justice and affected a ten block radius of the city, including 50 houses and more than 200 commercial establishments. Colombian National police chief Oscar Naranjo said the car bomb was triggered by a cellular phone, and that surveillance tapes showed that the suspect vehicle was parked for only one minute before the driver quickly escaped on a motorcycle prior to the blast. Naranjo stated that 1,000 additional police were being temporarily directed to Cali to step up security, and that approximately 200-300 of these officers would permanently remain in the city. The increased police presence will likely make Cali less vulnerable, but will detract from security efforts elsewhere.

¶3. (C) Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos blamed the attack specifically on Ivan Cardenas Carrillo (alias "Narices"), who assumed leadership of the Manuel Cepeda Vargas Front following the previous commander's capture in May 2008 in Buenaventura. Santos said that "with these acts, the FARC wants to demonstrate that they are still alive." He

announced a reward of 400 million pesos (roughly 200,000 USD) for information leading to the capture of the individuals responsible for the Cali bombing. The FARC did not claim responsibility for the attack.

ANTIOQUIA BOMBINGS RESPONSE TO COCA ERADICATION

¶4. (U) On August 14, the FARC set off a medium-intensity bomb in Ituango, Antioquia during a local celebration that killed seven and injured 53. Several children were among the victims. Police quickly detained FARC 18th front member "El Pajaro", who reportedly set off the device using a cell phone. On August 22 in San Rafael, Antioquia, a second, similar detonation killed one civilian and injured a dozen more. Colonel Luis Eduardo Martinez, CNP commander in Antioquia, said the attacks were perpetrated by the FARC in retaliation for the GOC's extensive manual and aerial eradication programs against illegal coca in the region. Earlier this year, Antioquia experienced disruptive roadblocks and protests against coca eradication efforts. The GOC accused the FARC and other criminal groups of orchestrating these demonstrations, which resulted in casualties when protesters clashed with police.

SOME BOGOTA BOMBINGS TIED TO FARC EXTORTION

¶5. (C) GOC officials also attributed several smaller explosions in Bogota in August to the FARC. On August 16, two Bogota supermarkets in the large French-owned Carrefour chain were targeted with small incendiary explosive devices, producing no casualties and minimal damage but prompting concern among GOC officials. Carrefour managers said they had not received any extortion threats from the FARC prior to the bombings. Still, "El Tiempo" reported on August 18 that several other small explosions in Bogota targeting local businesses in the last six months have been linked to FARC extortion efforts (see reftel). Bogota Government Secretary Clara Lopez told us the local government is concerned about a rise in extortion rackets in the capital.

AS FARC SETBACKS CONTINUE

¶6. (C) Reacting to a wave of recent losses, the FARC Secretariat issued a statement on August 21 stressing that the group remains "strong" and would proceed with its "Bolivarian Platform." Adding to the setbacks for the FARC, the Colombian military reported on August 24 that a mid-level FARC commander known as "Gabino" was killed in combat in Arauca, near the Venezuelan border. Gabino was reportedly the head of a FARC mobile column, and was responsible for the security of German Suarez Briceno (alias "Grannobles") -- brother of FARC Secretariat member and Eastern Bloc Commander Mono Jojoy. Grannobles is wanted in the United States for the 1999 kidnapping and murder of Amcits Larry Gay Laheenae, Terence Freitas, and Ingrid Inawatuk.

WORRIED GOC STEPS UP SECURITY

¶7. (C) The August 31 Cali bombing shows the FARC is still capable of carrying out a deadly attack in a major, urban area. Bogota Mayor Samuel Moreno told us recently that the small spike in attacks against targets of opportunity in the country has prompted concern among city and national security officials. The bombings also reveal that the FARC remains committed to larger-scale attacks to show its resiliency in the wake of recent losses. Moreno publicly stated on August 12 that the FARC plans to destabilize Bogota, and encouraged citizens to report any suspicious activity to the police. Due to an increased police and military presence in the capital and the degradation of its urban network, the FARC has been unable to carry out a significant terrorist bombing in Bogota since the Bogota Military War College car bombing in October 2006.

